

**Judging:** IW scoring progression was a little different during the regional season than in past seasons and we will continue to analyze and apply standards across all regions. A shortened season, exposure of color guards, and consistent scoring application were some of the reasons. As a result, scores reached the upper part of box 4 and lower box 5 early and remained there for a majority of the season. Working with Karl and the managers, we communicated with judges the standard for mid box 5 (always applies, most/most) throughout the season. Judges were told to be consistent in that application and they could not go into that third of box 5 unwillingly (because of poor numbers management). Do we need to discuss the box 5 philosophy of “always applies”? Can scores ever go down from regional to regional or even at Championships?

We also saw scores that were low at Championships because of the large numbers of teams in the same neighborhood. Additionally, semi-finals with 24 IW in one round requires scores to start lower. At no other time during the season do judges evaluate that many color guards in one event without rounds – this requires numbers management precision and an understanding of how teams advance and the purpose of each contest. This is very difficult for even an experienced judge, skews the application of numbers in both spreads and profiling.

Standing / Rankings – As much as we discuss this issue and the fact that judges do not reference these rankings, it seems to be a concern for many. I spend countless hours responding to your concerns regarding rankings. There are many aspects that impact the ranking differentiation between the regional season and Championships, such as the number of teams in each class, when and how many regionals a team attends, the imperfect application of increasing 1.5 points a week, judge exposure, championship performance, etc.

Here are the numbers and some highlights:

IA - 17 places of differentiation (36<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 53<sup>rd</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 8<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 14<sup>th</sup>)

IO - 11 places of differentiation (20<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 9<sup>th</sup>)

IW - 4 places of differentiation

SA - 42 places of differentiation (72<sup>nd</sup> ranked team finished 114<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 5<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 38<sup>th</sup>)

SO - 13 places of differentiation (21<sup>st</sup> ranked team finished 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> ranked team finished 3<sup>rd</sup>)

SW - 4 places of differentiation

World Class judge exposure – Some of you have asked and are concerned regarding the number of Championship judges you had seen during the regional year. The specific numbers are below. In my opinion this data may be interesting to review (like rankings) but has no relevance to the outcome of Championships. As you can see, the average in both Independent and Scholastic World is about 3.5. Meaning most teams saw on average a little more than three judges (out of ten) during the regional season and at Championships. If this is something you think is important, I can work towards perhaps a number closer to 5. Meaning half the judges at Championships would have had world class exposure during the regional season with your team. Note that this is an average, and it would be impossible to guarantee such exposure. It makes the Rubik’s Cube of scheduling even that more complicated. There are many factors that contribute to this exposure, the most relevant is the number of regionals a team attends. Geography plays an important role, as teams that are isolated (or from Europe) will have less exposure. Also, there are four other classes of competition at Championships, and trying to strike a balance between A and Open class exposure must also be a consideration.

Independent World – average 3.8, range 7-0

Scholastic World – average 3.4, range 9-0

Workload decrease – Dale can speak to this with more precision than I but suffice to say that there was a substantial increase in the number of judges brought into regionals and Championships. In many cases this allowed for more reads from a broader swatch of judges and provided shorter workdays for judges. This enabled judges to be less fatigued. It also allowed for easier problem solving when weather and travel issues occurred.

At Championships, judges also worked less than in the past. Judges with two or more affiliations judged only two contests, this was due to the monumental tasks of balancing scheduling.

Here are the numbers for Championships:

Four contests – 21 judges

Three contests – 12 judges

Two contests – 7 judges

We brought in 15% new judges to Championships. Two judges were on the World panel for the first time (one in SW and one is IW). These judges performed at a high-level last year and during the regional season. This was in response to your request for new judges at Championships. Our goal is to continue to bring in new judges to Championships, this will occur through rotation and attrition. In addition, we are striving to put new judges in high profile contests.

All contests were assigned a non-working lead judge at Championships, which is critical to the dynamics of these contests. There were brief periods where I tried to be in two places at once, to expand my exposure beyond World Class teams. Trying to be at two contests at the same time was not optimal, I will not make that scheduling choice again.

As mandated by this body, all Championship scoring in box 6 and scores of 100 require explanation by the judge to me. This occurred in person after the contest, or through email after the event. All explanations adhered to the box criteria and were used in a proper way.

### **Judge Input:**

Your input is important – As per our discussion last year at this meeting, we linked the judge evaluation to your regional surveys. As a result, the input was greater: In 2023 there were 25 submitted judge evaluations, in 2024 there were 60 submitted judge evaluations. Most of these evaluations were specific to scoring, rankings, commentary and many of them were positive. However, there were a few that brought to light a specific judge concern that I was not aware of, and this allowed for some intervention and education. This new process was created due to lack of participation in the yearly judge survey. With so little input over the last five years or so, I continue to work on the assumption that you are satisfied with the state of judging.

Judges prepare during the week for each contest and perform at their personal best, do they make mistakes? Yes, but we hope that they are minor. Lead judges at regionals support judges during the event, answer questions and assure they are set up for success, (provided there are non-working leads – power regionals all have non-working leads, other regionals have working leads). After the weekend, managers and I examine their work (numbers and commentary). Swift input is provided when determined a redirection, training or encouragement is needed. Much of my time during the week is spent doing this type of work.

There are several instructors that text or try to call me during the season. To create the most even playing field possible, I do not respond to these. I even blocked some callers and texters. I often respond with one reply to cover multiple evaluations for the same team.

My role is to assure the philosophy is being adhered to by judges and that they are doing their absolute best in producing high quality commentary and numbers that reflect the performance of the day. I support new judges and judges that are working in a second caption. My job is not to prescribe outcomes or influence judges. I am not a proxy for judge critiques. I am available for conversations at any contest where I am the lead judge; once the contest has concluded, you must follow the prescribed protocol for judge evaluations.

### **Social Media:**

There were two specific incidents that were brought to my attention in which instructors (with teams represented in this room) posted negative comments about WGI judges on various social media sites. In one incident, a judge's name was specifically cited in the post, the other was a more cursory and general swipe at WGI judges. Both were negative and had adverse impacts in the judge community. Dale worked to mitigate both situations, but this required conversations with instructors and judges that took valuable time in the middle of the season. I must say that this type of behavior is shocking and unacceptable. If a judge would have posted the exact same content, they would not be used again. In my opinion, there needs to be a stronger code of conduct adhered to for the instructor community. To my knowledge, there were no incidents of judge misuse of social media.

### **Critiques:**

There were several incidents where critiques were less than productive and, in some cases, insulting, condescending and worked to build walls instead of build bridges. This is from both instructors and judges. We continue to emphasize a "customer service" approach for judges, and while judge interaction has markedly improved over the years, we still need to continue to make strides. I heard from some of you that a specific judge or two was not engaged, arms folded and not in the correct frame of mind going into the critique. Judges feel the same anxiety, pressure and nervousness that you do in critiques. They have often worked all day; their stamina is not what it should be when they enter these conversations. This is not an excuse, simply information. We make note of these concerns and make sure the judges know what they are projecting, this includes body language, tone, demeanor, etc.

From the instructor end, I witnessed inappropriate behavior in many critiques. Here are some examples: "your file was so awful, I couldn't tell what caption you were judging", "you have to be kidding me with that number, it is terrible....we had a higher number three weeks ago," "I question your ability as a judge if you didn't see how much we were doing." I witnessed instructors slamming their hands on the table and storming off. I will continue to work on the judge approach to critique, but there needs to be a mature, consistent approach from the instructors as well.

How can we make critique more productive and valuable? I asked this question last year, and it seems that we are somewhat limited as to our options? My request is that we continue to move the pendulum from what acceptable behavior was in the past, to what we our expectation is now. Feedback from judges is that critiques do not provide valuable information for them, except for the rare team that knows how to leverage the time. For many "A" class teams, judges become consultants and system experts. In upper classes, judges become defendants and recipients of ill-directed anger. In most cases, once you critique with a judge, you never see that judge again during the season. Is there a better way?

### **Affiliations:**

We had 10 judges with affiliations: six with secondary affiliations and four with primary affiliations. Have we evolved to a point where we are not interested in using judges with a primary affiliation? In the past, the concern had been a judge "could" keep regional scores down in the class they complete. The thought was that could impact the ranking score and give the judge's team an advantage. I have never found evidence that this

occurred. We simply have too many safeguards in place, along with the intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that exist for judges. We remind affiliated judges every year of the highly sensitive climate and balancing act they must walk during the season and especially during Championships.

It has been brought to my attention that there are concerns with the entire judge panel, being sympathetic to teams with a judge on staff. When we look at the neighborhoods of teams, one needs to ask the question: Is this team higher in a neighborhood than they would be? Do a judge's friendships interfere with the objective nature of the working judge? It is imperative that there is an open and honest discussion around this concern.

**Education:** No philosophical change for 2024

Bev and William were added to the Steering Committee this year – working as a judge liaison on the Steering Committee. They were only involved in discussions relating to judge philosophy, application and judging. As working judges, they were able to offer firsthand observations and experiences in addition to adding a judge perspective during discussions. Karl can speak to their participation on this committee more specifically if needed.

Full panel virtual judge meeting (posted on the WGI dashboard) on January 8th, topics included: social media policy, scoring priorities reinforced, using your own voice (videos of the entire panel answering questions to specific judge related topics), saying more with less (be clear, concise and scoring significant), being your best for every team, future leaders video (inclusion), preparing for the season, critiques (continuing to be a service provider), changes (regional A 60/140, performers increase to 50), update from behind the scenes (scheduling, judge evaluation examples), know your brand, workday changes, leadership triad. If you have questions or request any explanation of the topics of the meeting, please let me know.

Each judge was required to submit an individual growth goal. They then worked with their manager throughout the season to meet this goal. At the conclusion of the season, they were asked if they thought the goal was met, and to start thinking about how this could impact their future.

I conducted weekly conference calls with the managers, topics included: judge performance, regional and Championship preparation, scoring trends, profiling, education, discussion points for the “off season,” judge evaluation forms, individual education progress, future training topics, monitoring of new judges and all judges of their individual growth goals. Each caption had a “kickoff” meeting prior to the season. This format was used to facilitate smaller groups of judges and allowed for question / answer / discussion time. IA meeting was January 29, and DA/GE was February 5<sup>th</sup>.

Mid-season caption zoom calls were held at two different times, one for movement and equipment and one for design and effect. These calls were recorded for judges that were unavailable.

Five non-working judges attended World Championships on their own, trial judging during prelims or semis. These judges tended to be somewhat new to the WGI ranks, they trialed entire rounds and submitted their files and numbers to their managers and Karl. The commitment of judges to improve their craft is stronger than ever.

Three judges were brought into Championships for the first time. In preparation for new judges at Championships, the managers and I prepared them in a variety of ways. Specific information was prepared for them, along with a specific zoom meeting and assigning of Championship mentors. I had one-on-one meetings with several of them in Dayton during their free time, in preparation for their contests. A FAQ document was

created with the assistance of Lyera (the event coordinator) where logistics as well as judge preparation for specific contests were outlined. All in all, I thought these people performed exceptionally well.

Two judges were dedicated to the virtual season, judging all events. This created a consistency, multiple views and similar perspective for the units that submitted videos. I am not certain as to the future of this service, it seemed to me that the numbers of competing teams were down, and perhaps virtual contests have run their course.

In-Sight Sheets gave way two years ago to 300-character introductions that were housed in Competition Suite. Judges utilized this new tool to prepare themselves prior to the start of each program. Ease of access increased percentages of use as well as real time access. This was a more positive approach and was inclusive (all color guards had access to this tool). These introductions were fluid, many took the opportunity to edit during the season. The percentages of success are growing, but this tool is ill-used in most cases. The most success of these include information that provides insight, they do not state the obvious. Of course, they include a title, and they are most often directed towards upstairs judges. A well written sheet can do wonders to promote your program, do not underestimate the value of this tool.

WGIcon will enable all judges on the roster to attend this groundbreaking event September 6-8. While sessions are still in the development stage, some will serve as educational opportunities for judges. This will also allow time for interpersonal relationships building between instructors and judges, without the stress of the competitive season.

#### **Additional Caption Protocol:**

We discussed additional caption judging last year and my directive was to monitor this process more carefully. We have had increased success with this. Judges make a much easier transition from downstairs to upstairs – this is where we find the most success. It is nearly impossible to take an upstairs judge and train them for a downstairs caption. There are some exceptions, like a GE judge that has a dance degree and pedigree for quality movement.

Judges are system experts with caption specific abilities, training, and competencies. Numbers management and the philosophy of judging apply to all captions along with having a strong background in the standards, history, and operation of the activity. While judges focus on one caption as they enter the WGI community, they often judge multiple captions locally or across the country. Once a judge is established in one caption, and has settled into the culture, additional captions may be considered for judging at WGI regionals. If you would like more detailed description of the training process for second caption judging, refer to last year's report or reach out to me and I will send it to you. Below are the bullet points that highlight the advantages.

- Providing teams with supplemental commentary at a single event.
- Leveraging judge expertise in more areas.
- Allowing for mental shifts for the judges making them fresher across the entire day.
- Enabling the judge panel to more easily cover any travel related challenges or missing judges.
- Enabling relief at regionals with 7 judge panel.

Dale, Karl and I continue to have conversations surrounding second caption judges and for 2025 we will do everything we can so that during the month on March judges are used in the caption we plan to use them at Championships. This ensures that those critiques will occur with judges that will be evaluating your teams should you see them at Championships. Of course this adds to the complexity of scheduling, and there are some situations where a single panel is used or other restrictions occur. Every effort will be made to make this happen.

**Sampling:** As per our conversation last year at this meeting, we spent considerable time discussing and training judges to be more aware of sampling. Not just the “obvious” presentational sections of the stage. I believe we made an improvement with this concern. I did not hear any concerns through judge evaluations or in person regarding this.

However, with the additional number of performers (40 to 50), I found that we had to double down on this process of sampling. Early in the regional season I listened to commentary files that referenced the numbers of performers and the perceived disadvantage to sampling. Comments such as, “I can’t see through all the layers of performers to sample the flags in the back of the stage” and similar such comments (primarily from downstairs judges). At this point, the managers and I discussed ways to overcome this perceived challenge. We discussed it at the midseason caption call, at all pre-contest judge meetings and individually when we heard specific comments regarding the number of performers. As in all shifts in our activity, the judging aspect is always working hard to catch up with the designers’ choices. This is a perfect example of such, with the increase from 40 to 50 performers there continues to be some training that needs to occur. This is a new concern; we continue to discuss and address this and will continue to remind and monitor judges.

**Lead judges:** Currently only the Administration has access to Competition Suite while the contest is occurring (Curtis, William, Beverly), working leads do not have access to Competition Suite during the contest. Non-working review numbers before they are verified by judges, but do not direct judges as to ranking or rating. I monitor scores across the country and will communicate with working leads, when possible, in real time, but this is challenging and often times does not occur as well as I would like. Leads currently ask judges their ranges after the first few groups in each class, but not during the contest. There are times where checking numbers after class changes would be helpful. This provides a safety net and is never heavy handed; it is only informational – the decision rests with the individual judge. As is usually the case, when discrepancies occur, it is because a judge has over or under valued a specific point of comparison. The difficulty is that working leads currently do not have real time access to numbers, and in most cases, anomalies are not avoided.

**Judge Training moving forward:** A judge academy is being planned for the upcoming season, there was no judge academy this year. There will be a shift in the application and acceptance process, Karl can speak to those specifics.

Obviously, you all are aware of WGICon. A portion of this event will be dedicated to judge training, with judges participating in some required sessions focused on their craft. Some additional time will be granted for judge enrichment, in which they will choose which sessions to attend. This is still in the development stage, and we are excited and grateful to have the opportunity to participate.